An early, or late, example of the Common Quaker *Orthosia cerasi* (Fabr.) (Lep.: Noctuidae)

With the weather being cloudy, and very mild, on 30 November 2001, I ran my Robinson-pattern trap in the garden. On examining the catch the next morning, I was most surprised to find a perfect specimen of the Common Quaker.

Skinner (1998. *The colour identification guide to Moths of the British Isles*. Second edition: Viking), states that the flight period is March and April; on checking my past garden records I see that I have recorded it here from early February to the middle of May. Other species recorded that nights were December Moth *Poecilocampa populi* (L.), Grey Pine Carpet *Thera obeliscata* (Hb.), Wormwood Pug *Eupithecia absinthiata* (Clerck), Double-striped Pug *Gymnoscelis rufifasciata* (Haw.), Chestnut *Conistra vaccinii* (L.), Brick *Agrochola circellaris* (Hufn.) and Silver Y *Autographa gamma* (L.).– TONY STEELE, 57 Westfield Road, Barnehurst, Kent DA7 6LR.

The November Pug? A record of *Eupithecia assimilata* Doubleday (Lep.: Geometridae) in November

In line with the general theme of "out of date" moths, I can report that Andrew Wood recently reported to me that he had captured a male Currant Pug *Eupithecia assimilata* in his garden light trap at Bengeo Street, Hertford on the night of 2 November 2001. He most kindly sent me the living specimen for verification; it was a male.– COLIN W. PLANT, 14 West Road, Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 3QP (E-mail: colinwplant@ntlworld.com).

Unusually-timed occurrences of two *Orthosia* species (Lep.: Noctuidae) from Essex

A record, backed by a specimen, of the Common Quaker *Orthosia cerasi* (Fabr.) dated 16 October 2001 was recently passed on to me from a trap run by Jean and Tim Green at Theydon Bois, South Essex. Following this, and after she had carefully checked the specimen, Anne Lansdown reported a Hebrew Character *Orthosia gothica* (L.) on 23 October 2001 at Lawford, North Essex.

Both sites, and others further away, encountered some possible migrant activity on the night but all these, such as Dark Sword-grass *Agrotis ipsilon* (Hufn.) and Silver Y *Autographa gamma* (L.) could easily have bred in Britain, so evidence for migration is at best slim. Steve Nash (pers. comm.) recorded a Small Quaker *Orthosia cruda* (D.&S.) at Fernham, Berkshire, on 17 October 1988 together with five Vestals, *Rhodometra sacraria* (L.), a Convolvulus Hawk-moth *Agrius convolvuli* (L.) and a Small Mottled Willow *Spodoptera exigua* (Hb.). I am not aware that Continental *Orthosia* are double-brooded, or that they fly markedly earlier that their British counterparts. Martin Corley (via S. Nash, pers. comm.) states that in his experience most Portuguese *Orthosia* species fly in March and April, though some of these are from mountain areas. It seems more probable that the Essex moths at least were produced locally. Interestingly, numbers of the pyralids *Hypsopygia costalis* (Fabr.) and *Orthopygia glaucinalis* (L.) were seen at this time, suggesting a second brood.

Because of mild weather it seems unlikely the pair could have been fooled into thinking a winter had passed, so it is possible that either some other environmental stress condition affected their emergence, or that isolated specimens occasionally simply "screw up", perhaps because of a genetic fault.

Other early dates for *O. cerasi* are 13 December 1998, Isle of Wight (B. Warne); 5 December 2000, Devon (R. Bogue *Ent. Rec.* **113:** 17); 3 December 2000, West Yorkshire (P. Talbot *Ent. Rec.* **113:** 17-18); and 25 November 1999, Suffolk (N. Sherman, given in Talbot, *Ent. Rec.* **113:** 17-18). Other exceptionally early dates for Spring species are summarised in Plant, C. W. *Ent. Rec.* **113:** 63-64.– BRIAN GOODEY, 298 Ipswich Road, Colchester, Essex CO4 4ET. (E-mail: brian.goodey@dial.pipex.com)

Notes from the bug room – 1

Beware of gifts from friends – you never know where they may lead! In July 2000, my friend Boyd Barr of Balinluig, Perthshire reared a few *Arctia caja* L. from wild larvae collected around the village. Purely for amusement he used a fresh female to assemble the local males. He was pleasantly surprised to attract one male which stood out from the crowd by having dusky orange hindwings (?ab *brunnescens* Stattermayer). He allowed this fortunate male to pair with his typical female and the resultant larvae he sent to me with the suggestion that I "rear a few to see if any abs appear".

Kept in my hot sunroom, about half of the larvae grew rapidly and produced a generation of adult moths in September. Some of these had a slight – very slight – hint of dark shading on the hindwings! These I allowed to pair. Out of idle curiosity I subjected some of these F1 pupae to high and low temperatures in the first 24 hours of their existence. As you might have guessed the pupae in the incubator (37°C for three days) produced moths with a paler orange hindwing, reduced hindwing spotting and increased areas of white on the forewing. Pupae exposed to 0°C for three days produced moths with scarlet orange hindwings, larger hindwing spots and increased areas of brown on the forewings. Surprisingly, this latter group were more-or-less indistinguishable from the control group hatched at room temperature. The changes in colour and pattern were not extreme and the hint of hindwing shading appeared in all three groups.

An F2 generation of 83 adults emerged in November. Of these 64 were of typical appearance and 19 had dusky hindwings. A surprise was the appearance of ab. *consolidata* Cockayne in which the triple forewing costal brown blotch is "filled in" to produce a single blotch. Specimens with both atypical characters were chosen to produce the next generation.

So far, so good. When I announced my intention to continue breeding *caja* through the winter, Boyd asked how I intended to feed them? "Not a problem, mate," I replied "We hardly ever have frost down here and it never snows". How those rash words would return to haunt me. Before Christmas the hard frost had reduced our luxuriant local docks to mush. Even the dandelions disappeared! On 30 December I was out in the snow collecting a bucket of small nettle shoots, which the larvae devoured in